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CENTENNIAL BIRTHDAYS

By MARY K. HYDE



It would be interesting to know whether the present year will prove as fruitful in the production of men of genius as the year 1809, which gave to the world at least nine of its greatest men.

This year will mark the centennial of the birth of a wonderful group, as varied in gifts as in nationality. The month of January claims only one, as does December; February was the birth month of three; March and August each boasts two. One scientist, two statesmen, two musicians, and four poets formed a famous galaxy who brought distinction to their several countries and left their enduring mark on the nineteenth century. Three of them were Americans, four Englishmen, one was Polish-French, and one German-Hebrew. Of the four poets, America can proudly claim two. Poe and Holmes, if not as great as Tennyson, were surely much greater than Fitzgerald. As a statesman our Lincoln nobly balances Gladstone. The musicians and scientist of 1809 have no contemporaneous peers in America.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Cambridge, Massachusetts, August 29

What schoolboy has not learned to recite the lines, "Ay, tear her tattered ensign down!" and what American heart ever

fails to respond to the simple force of "Old Ironsides"? Who has not enjoyed the wonderful beauty of "The Chambered Nautilus," or laughed at "The One-Hoss Shay," or perhaps shed a tear over "The Last Leaf"?

The witty and vivacious Autocrat of the Breakfast Table is dear to all who value a merry heart as well as a keen intellect. Dr. Holmes was the most friendly, genial, and informal writer, with an individuality so marked as to make him one of our best-known men of letters. "He was a person not only to be admired but loved," wrote Dr. S. F. Smith, the author of "America." "Ever cheerful and happy, he enjoyed life to the full and spread sunshine around him. Whatever of literary distinction and literary honors could be attained by a student were conferred upon him. His published volumes are a valuable addition to our English literature. Whether in poetry or prose, his elegant writings display his power as one on whom God has showered his choicest gifts."

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Boston, Massachusetts, January 19

In sharp distinction from Holmes, Poe seemed utterly wanting in genuine humor. He had little of the mother wit that comes

in flashes, but was more inclined to the whimsical and grotesque. He has been called a pioneer of the art feeling in American literature. He was devoted to art as the exponent of beauty, and the passion for loveliness governed his emotions and convictions. Beauty to him was a definite reality. "His works were almost too spiritual," comments Stedman. "His sense of the sublime and mystical filled him with thoughts of other worlds and existences than ours. He stands unique among his fellows, so different from any other writer that America has produced as really to stand alone."

Like Holmes, Poe wrote prose as well as poetry, but it is as the author of "The Raven" and "The Bells" that he remains popular. Unlike Holmes, again, Poe's life lays always in the shadow. A victim of tainted inheritance, unfortunate environments, and a temperament lacking self-control, he lived a life of struggle between his good genius and his bad. He has always been described as the most isolated and exceptional of all our poets.

ALFRED TENNYSON

Lincolnshire, England, August 6

Poe himself pronounced Tennyson "the noblest poet that ever lived." There was a

time when Tennyson was generally considered the rarest poet that England had ever produced, when his themes were approved, his art admired, and his grace, sweetness, purity, simplicity, and intellectual sympathy considered beyond criticism. As new schools of poetry have developed, defects and limitations have been pointed out, and yet Tennyson's writings are still considered the most exquisite literary workmanship of the past century. "His verses still bewitch youths and artists by their sentiments and beauty, but their thought takes hold of thinkers and men of the world," wrote the late Edmund Clarence Stedman.

There is a legend at Cambridge to the effect that while in college there Tennyson submitted his first poem in competition for a prize; it was marked by one of the examiners "V. Q.," which he meant for "Very queer," but the other examiners marked it "V. G."—"Very good"—and assigned the medal to it. Perhaps there are some of Tennyson's poems which many readers today, if asked to give an honest opinion, might mark "V. Q." On the whole, however, they still maintain their honorable place in English verse. If he had given the world no other poem than his last, "Crossing the Bar," he would have merited

the love and admiration of all English-speaking people.

EDWARD FITZGERALD

Suffolk, England, March 31

On the death of Fitzgerald, Lord Tennyson wrote: "He was one of the kindest of men, and I have never known one of so fine and delicate a wit." It is not, however, as a creator of original verse that he is known, but as a translator of foreign classics into English. Fitzgerald displayed the rare ability to translate not merely the words, nor even the ideas, but to grasp the spirit of the original author. Too frequently the reader of a translation realizes that he is missing the true beauty which he dimly perceives has been lost in the interpretation. Fitzgerald possessed the art of retaining the original flavor of the sweetness which had been preserved so long in the ancient languages.

"In the whole range of literature," said the late Charles Eliot Norton, "there is hardly to be found a more admirable example of the most skillful poetic rendering of remote foreign poetry." In books, in painting, in music, in religion, it is said that he was especially attracted by all that was simple, lofty, and heroic.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Hardin County, Kentucky, February 12

The birthday of one of these "wonderful nine" has become a national holiday. Every schoolboy and girl knows whose birthday is celebrated on February 12. The humblest child of the East Side, the little citizens of foreign birth who have not yet learned to read English, the mere babies of the kindergarten, all have been taught "Lincoln's Birthday" and to recognize the strong, kindly face of our martyred president as it decorates every schoolhouse in the land.

Born to an inheritance of stern poverty and rude toil, he grew to be the greatest man of his times, the most unselfish and most honest ruler of the century. The story of his life needs no telling to American readers, if, indeed, to any the wide world over. His character is summed up, perhaps as satisfactorily as possible, in a few words by the Rev. J. H. Hartwell: "Just as Aristides, humble as Cincinnatus, humane and magnanimous as Constantine, he gained the confidence, the admiration, and affection of the people. With his heart wedded to the attractive principles of justice and liberty, shaking hands with the humblest soldier and poorest bondsman, having a word and a smile for all, even those in the lowest condition, he will pass into history as one of the greatest benefactors of the human race."

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

Liverpool, England, December 29

There is a reminder of Lincoln's most famous utterance, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," in a sentiment expressed by Gladstone. "It is always best to take the charitable view," he used to say, "always best, especially in politics." Not so unlike in character to our great statesman, humanitarian was the "grand old man" of England, stern, strong, honest, and earnest, a fearless leader when he was convinced that he was right. "I have made mistakes enough in my political career," he once said to a friend, "but I can honestly assert that I have never said or done anything in politics in which I did not sincerely believe."

Mr. Gladstone sat for sixty-three years in Parliament. For more than twenty-six years he was leader of his party and the central figure of English politics. But politics were far from being all in all to Gladstone. His reading covered almost the whole field of literature except physical and mathematical science. He read slowly and most conscientiously. He never skipped a page or a line, but the number of books mastered every year was enormous. He was blessed with a wonderfully retentive memory, and acquired a stock of knowledge on a vast variety of subjects. His capacity for transacting public business was unsurpassed, as well as his combination of sound judgment and firm decision.

"No man has lived in our times," writes the Honorable James Bryce, "of whom it is so hard to speak in a concise and summary fashion as Mr. Gladstone. For forty years he was so closely associated with the public affairs of his country that the record of his parliamentary life comes near to being an outline of English politics. His activity spread itself out over many fields. He was the author of several learned and thoughtful books, and of a multitude of articles upon all sorts of subjects. He showed himself as eagerly interested in

matters of classical scholarship and Christian doctrine and ecclesiastical history as in questions of national finance and foreign policy."

CHARLES ROBERT DARWIN

Shrewsbury, England, February 12

"We have not a scientific man that can be compared to Darwin," wrote Dean Farrar. And by curious coincidence, he stands alone so far as the present centennial galaxy is concerned, although he might justly be compared with the American whose birthday falls on the same day, for Darwin was truly an emancipator in his realm.

The century has seen no greater advance in any line than in the progress of scientific experiments and the introduction of the study of science into institutions of learning. Classic education was formerly emphasized, and it was not until the last century was more than half gone that science was generally taught in the schools. Nowadays there is no large school that does not offer its pupils an opportunity to acquire practical and experimental knowledge of science, while great institutions have been founded for instruction in science alone.

When Darwin was a boy his schoolmates called him by the pleasing nickname "Gas," because he spent all his time reading and experimenting in chemistry. Indeed, he was publicly reprimanded by his teacher for neglecting his other studies and "wasting" his time. When in later years he began to make known the results of his deep scientific researches in altogether new and original lines he suffered the taunts of critics and won the new epithet of "Crank." Nothing in the history of science is more remarkable than the calm patience and humility with which he awaited the verdict of later generations. His investigations are believed to have effected a greater revolution in the opinions of mankind than those of any other scientist, at least since Newton. To ignore Darwin is to ignore modern science. His works, besides their scientific value, have a broad human interest, and are not to be overlooked from a literary standpoint. "When the extent of his work is properly estimated," said John Fiske, "it is not too much to say that among the great leaders of human thought that has ever lived there are not a dozen who have achieved as much as he."

Those who knew Darwin most intimately are unanimous in their appreciation of the nobility and beauty of his whole nature. He is described as possessing a sweet and simple dignity as well as a rare degree of modesty. The story is told of a visit made by Gladstone to the great scientist when he was shaking the world with the announcement of his new theories. "Mr. Gladstone, as soon as seated," says Morley, "took Darwin's interest in affairs of state for granted and launched forth his political thunderbolts with unexhausted zest. His great, wise, simple, and truth-loving listener, then, I think, busy on digestive powers of the drosera in his greenhouse, was intensely delighted. When we broke up, watching Mr. Gladstone's erect, alert figure as he walked away, Darwin, shading his eyes with his hand against the evening rays, said to me in unaffected satisfaction: 'What an honor that such a great man should come to visit me!'"

FRANCOIS FREDERIC CHOPIN

Near Warsaw, Poland, March 1

Although America boasts no great composer to offset those whose hundredth anniversaries will be observed this year by musicians and music-lovers the world over—a curious parallel has been suggested by Henry Tyrrell between Póe and Chopin. Not only was their genius of the same order, although one recorded his visions and dreams in music and the other in rhythmic verse, but there was a remarkable coincidence in the dates of their careers. Born in the same year, they died forty years later within ten days of each other.

Chopin was one of the greatest lyric masters. His claim to a high place among composers rests on his connection with the pianoforte. The earlier composers wrote for the organ or the orchestra. Extraordinary beauty of tone and variety of expression characterize piano music, which is especially adapted to expression of personal feeling and emotion. "The work that Chopin did for the pianoforte," writes one critic, "is so superlatively artistic in the development and use of its resources, and so refined in texture and so poetical in thought, that it ranks in importance with works of far more imposing dimensions.

His was not a strong nature, nor is his music bracing or elevating, but it has typical modern qualities to a remarkable degree. His coloring is beautiful, his rhythms wonderfully varied, and his fancy free and exuberant. It is rather the music for a highly cultivated and rich society, loving luxury and delicate excitements of sensibility, than for strong, energetic, and intellectual natures, but it has fascination also for all beings who have sympathy with imagination and rhythm, whether their characters are strong or languid."

FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Hamburg, Germany, February 3

Perhaps some of the best-loved piano compositions are those of Mendelssohn, for his "Songs Without Words" are household favorites, their simple sweetness giving pleasure to the young and the aged, to those of great culture as well as to the untrained music lover. Mendelssohn did not

by any means, however, devote his principal attention to the piano. His greatest works were oratorios, choral compositions, overtures, and concertos. He also became famous as a musical director. He was a noble successor of the greatest masters, and few human beings have possessed such natural gifts. His memory and facility in playing, his power in composition, and his talent for extemporizing were remarkable. Full of tenderness, passion, and sympathy, his compositions glow with the ardor of genius, while at the same time showing evidence of his extreme care and patient persistence in working for the best form of expression.

Mendelssohn was enthusiastically loved in his lifetime, not less for his pure and genial character than for his splendid attainments. Although descended from a Jewish family, his father had adopted Protestant Christianity, and it was Mendelssohn who gave us the grand oratorios Saint Peter, Saint Paul, and Elijah.



LOCATED in the southeastern corner of a certain state is a small country village known as Churchdale. Its population numbers only about five hundred souls, and they are scattered over many square miles of territory. But it is a pretty spot, resting in a valley, and through one corner of the village flows a small stream which steadily grows in size until, miles further on, it turns the giant wheels of many large factories before entering the waters of the mighty Atlantic.

Just why this "Garden of Eden," as it is called by city visitors, was ever named "Churchdale" is hard to fathom. There is but one meetinghouse in the village, and never has been but the one. But that fact is not vital to our story.

Eighteen miles to the northwest lies the wide-awake, hustling city of Harwich. It is pretty much like every other city, for, you know, there is a certain sameness about all cities, and this one is no exception to the rule. Several wealthy residents of Harwich had become convinced that a trolley line from Harwich through Churchdale and on to Ashland, twenty-three miles from the city and five miles from Churchdale, would be a paying investment. The fare to Churchdale was to be only fifteen cents, and to Ashland just an additional nickel. Anyone could afford to pay these amounts for the sake of reaching the city quickly and comfortably, and the trolley had a monopoly, owing to the fact that the steam road did not touch at either village.

Of course all the farmers had reckoned that with the advent of the trolley running directly past their doors the value of their farms would be increased many fold, and this was one of the main reasons why those who happened to be on the proposed line had given, or rather sold, certain stretches of their land to the railroad company for extremely low prices. The road had been completed, and as Uncle Napoleon and Aunt Net sat in their front yard and watched the first car whiz past they looked at each other and smiled.

"It'll be easy to get to the city, now," said the old weather-beaten farmer.

"Yes," replied the faithful wife, "it brings the city right to our front doorstep."

No truer words were ever spoken, for the first day the new line was in operation the whole city seemed to find its way to their hospitable home. Relatives who had never taken the trouble to write, much less make the trip from Harwich to Churchdale, and who never invited the old folks "from the country" to visit them in the city, swarmed in upon Farmer and Mrs. Perkins, and so it continued throughout the summer. Uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins, mere acquaintances and friends would drop in at any time, unannounced, just for a "social call." "The ride was so beautiful we felt we must take it." "It is our first ride into the country on the new line." "We did so want to see the old place." With these and other like remarks they proceeded to make themselves perfectly at home.

"Now, Aunt Net," they would invariably say, "don't you get anything extra on our account. We didn't come here to bother you

in the least. Have just what you and uncle were intending to have and keep right on with your work the same as though we were not here."

But such was an impossible thing for Mrs. Perkins. When she had guests they must be entertained and fed on the best the farm afforded. She was noted for miles around as being an especially good cook, and nothing in the eating line was ever placed upon her table which was not fit for a prince, a king, or any other human being. So it happened that every day there were "city visitors," as the boys termed them, and so it was again that Mrs. Perkins was hardly able to get her housework done, having so many big dinners to get and so many dishes to wash, all of which left no time for anything else.

Every one of these meals was greatly enjoyed, for an eighteen-mile ride in an open trolley car, amid glorious scenery, and a bracing breeze carrying the odor of fragrance of wild flowers full into their faces, gave each of them a hearty appetite, and the abundance of good things placed before them rapidly disappeared.

There was a time when the beautiful old rambling house seemed to invite every weary passer-by to enjoy its hospitality, for it seemed ever to say, "Come in, all ye that are weary, and find here rest." But it is not now extending the invitation quite so freely as it formerly did. Times have changed. Too many from the city would respond by trolley were it to sing its song of yore.

That first summer of the trolley Uncle Napoleon and Aunt Net were almost eaten out of house and home. The chickens had seemingly decreased by several score, the vegetables were nearly gone, a crop of hay had been spoiled, fences broken down, and havoc raised generally. But worse than all this, what the visitors couldn't or didn't eat there, they carried home with them. Raspberries, strawberries, vegetables of every variety, apples, grapes, eggs, butter, chickens, and numerous other things. Had all this been sold in the market a sum sufficient to have nearly lifted the mortgage would have been secured. As it was, there was nothing to put toward clearing the debt and the old folks were nearly broken-hearted. During a good share of the summer they had slept upon the floor in the attic, so that their guests could be comfortable. They ought not to do this and they knew it, but guests were guests and must be treated as such. Some of these came just for an hour's visit, some for a day, but the majority for a week or more. Still they were not guests, just members of the family. Hadn't they said so themselves?

What was to be done? That was the perplexing question which faced the old farm people. Uncle Napoleon began to think. He and his good wife had wanted to get to the city several times during the summer, but had been unable to do so on account of their visitors. And now when they left they never invited them to the city for a visit. Something must be done and an end put to this imposition at once, and uncle was just the man to study it out and find a way.